

William and Mary College
Williamsburg
James City County
Virginia

HABS No. VA-401

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PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA
District of Virginia

ANNEX 1

Historic American Buildings Survey

Prepared at Headquarters Office
for District of Virginia

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WILLIAM AND MARY COLLEGE
Williamsburg, James City County, Virginia

Owner: State of Virginia

Date of erection: 1695 et seq.

Architect: Attributed to Sir Christopher Wren through a reference in Hugh Jones' Present State of Virginia, London, 1724. The attribution has not been otherwise verified.

Present condition: Restored

Description:

Brick, English bond; two stories; hipped roof; 13 bays; center bay projected in pavilion, crowned by high pediment received against roof; gable dormers on roof; ridge chimneys and hexagonal center cupola. Rear has two wings, containing to the north the great hall, to the south the chapel, with arched doors and circular windows in the west walls; five tall arched windows in side walls. Rear of main building has arched loggia below two full stories.

Additional data:

The building burned several times and was restored 1927-31.

Other existing records:

Swem's Index of Virginia History
William and Mary Quarterly, October 1928, Vol. 8, No. 4, Second Series

Wren Attribution: possible

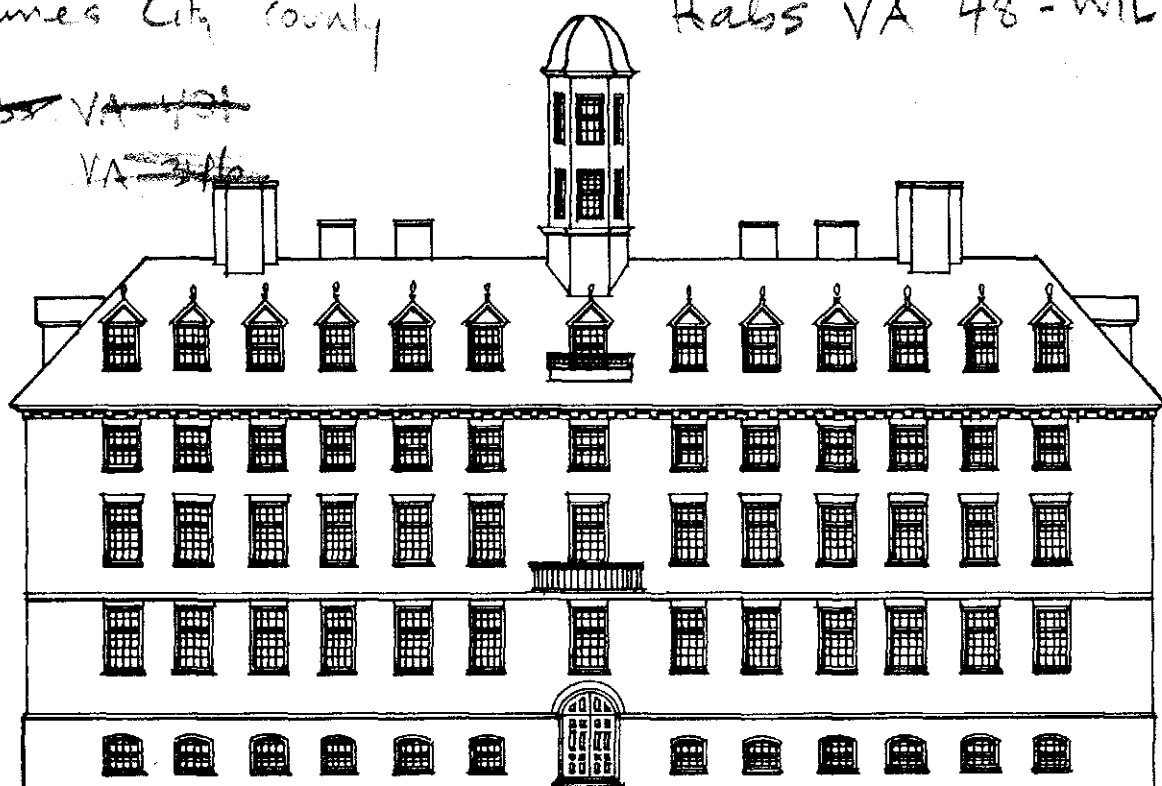
conjectural reconstruction of first form of building

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to the thirteen-bay-long façade. The dormer windows on both buildings were crowned with pedimented gables, but those of the earlier building appear to have been more elaborate, having finials on top. Both buildings had a balcony over the front door. The central cupolas on the roof of each building were probably quite different from each other, but both were hexagonal in plan.

At the back, the wall was undamaged by the fire in its whole height, and so it was left, three storeys tall on a high basement; this produces the rather curious effect of a lop-sided roof, for, with two storeys in front and three in back, the back cornice is of course higher than the front one. The whole is well handled, however, with four small hips and a pediment in the center at the back. The ground floor of the back shows one of the most interesting ideas of the early Colonies; it consists of an arcaded piazza with two large arches on either side of the central pavilion. This arrangement apparently dates from the earlier building. Also at the back are two more sides to the uncompleted quadrangle; these are the chapel wing to the south and the great hall to the north. They are on the foundations of the same parts of the original structure, and may have been an integral part of the second design, but were not built until a few years after the main part of the building.

The fire of 1705 was not the last suffered by the Wren building; it was burned and rebuilt in altered form many times, but fortunately much of the original fabric survived its Victorianization, and restorers were aided by two detailed views of the complex found on a plate in the Bodleian Library and by a plan for alterations (never executed) designed by Jefferson, so it is now well restored.

Wren
Building

